CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

A SERMON

BY

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SERMON.

"*For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*"—GEN. XVIII., 19.

IT was one of the most remarkable statements ever made by God concerning Abraham, the grandest of all the patriarchs, that He could *trust* his fidelity to his children. "I know him," says God, "I know the affection and loyalty of his heart alike to Me and to his children, and therefore am I confident they will be brought up in My stedfast fear and love." "*Fidelity to his children,*" I hear all the fathers and mothers in this assembly repeating to themselves, "Surely in this virtue there is nothing so rare or peculiar as to call for remark; there is not a father or mother among us would not, if need be, die for their children, why then say there was anything peculiar in Abraham's love, or why, above all, declare it was most remarkable

God should trust *his fidelity?*" I answer, it *was* something singular; it was far more than He could say of all parents; and I doubt whether he would say of every individual father in this congregation, or of those generally who profess Christianity, *I know them, that they will command their children and their household after them, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*

A child, what is it? A world, created indeed by the hand of God, but yet a world on which you can impress your own character and feelings. And, as the pure, unsullied sky can be affected by the land beneath it; as it can be dimmed and clouded by pestilent vapors rising from below, or only made more exquisite in contrast with the vivid fields: so the pure, innocent mind of childhood can be clouded by the sins and passions of a father's heart, or, on the other hand, be so cleared and brightened that in after manhood he shall have the glorious summer sunshine to illumine his path. All fathers, too, must feel that the great column which supports the fabric of their house is growing old, and must soon crumble to decay, and then the whole weight will come upon their children; and the question is, will they be able to sustain

it? will they be men and women of high and noble character, reflecting new lustre on their parents, or only the mere froth and spray of the ocean, driven up and down by all the passions and tumults of the heart? Will they be the granite walls against which the billows beat in vain, or only helpless pensioners on the capricious gods of fame, prosperity and wealth? These are the questions which wise and thoughtful parents will propound to themselves, and these are the themes to which they will devote all their energies and powers.

What a strange, and even contradictory substance a child's heart really is. What *good* and what *evil* impressions may we make upon it. We call a child's heart tender, its affections fickle, its fancies transitory, and so to a certain degree they are; but yet oftentimes the feeblest tracings on a child's heart are absolutely indelible, the storms and sins of after life cannot erase them, and down to old age the lessons of early childhood have a power and efficacy which work alike for good or evil, when every other voice is silent and all other work obliterated.

In the instruction of children, the first duty that should be always imposed upon them is: *obedience to parental authority*.

You have often walked through a gloomy forest, and there two things must have struck you, one, the freedom from all restraint observable everywhere; the other, obedience to law. Amid the sighings of the wind, amid the long, unbroken solitudes of nature, with no eye to see them but God's, and no arm to check them but His, all the trees and vines of the forest are absolutely uncontrolled and free. No being is there to bind the gigantic pines, or stay them as they mount upward to the skies. The wild vine is free to throw its helpless arms round the huge monarchs of the forest that rise like the pillars of some grand cathedral. All are free to grow and ripen as they please; yet all are bound. True to the law of their nature, the lordly trees silently rise till each can see its God. The lichens and mosses have a law by which they grow in meek loveliness. And thus amid the wildest apparent confusion, every object in the forest, from the humblest leaflet to the grandest oak, moves grandly on in accordance with a law as strict as that which regulates the stars above. Turn now to the moral world and observe the contrast. Here there is freedom, but it is the recklessness of the lawless. Here there is law, but it is the law of sin. Passions, not

God, ordinarily rule mankind. The principle is not, "what does God command?" but what do we like best? Impulses are the fierce winds that blow us up and down on the Adria of life, and therefore we must all see the absolute necessity of imparting to the young the high and holy principles of true religion,—of grounding them in every thing that is pure and good, that they may not in after years be carried to and fro by every wayward influence, but amid sorrows may have peace, amid weakness strength, and amid passions purity and truth.

As the first step to this, teach them the *meaning and authority of a parental command.* Before the child can grasp the meaning of the simplest theology—before it can understand the nature of any creed, the parents must be to them almost in the room of God. They are the supreme head of authority to them, and therefore they should, above all things, be conscientious how they discharge so solemn a duty.

Three laws should always be observed. First, let a command *be* a command. Many parents ruin their children by irresolution. They make a law, but if their children cry about it, if they worry and fret under the

restraint, if they implore them to remove it, at last they will give way, though they know in their own hearts that refusal would be better than permission. You should first make up your minds what is really right, then issue your command and stand to it. But let parents vacillate, let them alternate between what they *will* and what they *will not* allow, and in a little time their authority will sink into contempt. Their children will soon understand that a parental command is only a momentary obstacle that a little crying and a little coaxing can invariably remove. And this evil will soon develop into the awful form of disobedience to God himself; into that wild rebellion which terminates in the ruin and destruction of the soul.

A second rule is: *never let one parent be a court of appeal from another.* Nothing children find out sooner than which is the more indulgent parent of the two. The one who gratifies all their desires and reverses all the decisions of the other is loved, while the one who corrects them is looked upon as a real oppressor, and if not hated, is at least disliked. The two should be a unit, and to allow a difference between the parents is to sow discord among the children and make them invari-

ably believe that the sterner of the two is their foe and not their friend.

A third rule is: *Let all your teachings lead to Christ.* Bring your children to the Saviour of the world, that he may take them up into his arms, put his hands on them and bless them. Teach them to come to him as the unfailing fountain of all comfort and love; and as the eagle teaches its young to look straight up into the face of the blazing sun as the object toward which they are to fly, so teach your children to look up into the bright face of the Sun of righteousness as the mighty Being to whom all life is to be an ascent, and whose immediate presence is to be their fixed abode. The natural reverence a child has for its father is very great, and when it sees him kneel down and pray into those calm blue heavens, it may not know the meaning of prayer—it may not know who God is, but it will clasp its little hands, kneel down and do as *father* does. And when that father has gone to his long home; when all others have forgotten him, that child, now grown to manhood, will bless him with tears in his eyes.

And now suppose the first flush of childhood over. The children are no longer prattling innocents; they are ripening into men and

women, gazing upon a new world with wondering emotions, but yet with their religious convictions almost if not altogether unformed; and the question is: How shall they now be educated? The answer will be decided in most cases by that which parents consider to be of paramount importance. If, for instance, they believe the eternal welfare of their children is of the highest moment—if they look upon the salvation of their souls as that which must chiefly concern them, then they will take great care to place them where all the religious influences about them will be good; where they will be led to Christ as the hope and Saviour of their soul. If, on the other hand, they consider *polite accomplishments* the all-important requisite, leaving religion to care for itself, then they will only seek some institution where things are agreeable to their taste. And here I must speak of one of the greatest and most dangerous evils of the day: the practice of sending Protestant children to Roman Catholic schools and convents. It would be quite unnecessary for me to allude to this painful truth, were not the evil of immense and growing dimensions. The days were when our orthodoxy would be startled at so strange an idea as that of sending our children to the

Church of Rome to be educated by her, and made fit, through her influence, to take their future position as members of a Protestant communion and supporters of the reformed Church of England. But to-day things are changed; and as moral evils, like some physical maladies, are contagious, the practice has spread until at last the whole community is quite accustomed to the sight. The Protestant population of Montreal is not large, yet I am credibly informed that there are at present upwards of four hundred and fifty Protestant scholars in Roman Catholic schools in this city and its vicinity. They may not indeed all come from the city, many may be from the west, but with this we are not concerned, as not a few here must plead guilty.

Now, I ask, is this right? Can it be consistent? Can it be praiseworthy? Can it be anything else than a downright sin against God to take your sons and daughters at the very age when they are most susceptible, and place them in institutions where every effort that Rome can make will be made to subvert their faith and secure their allegiance to herself. "Ah," rejoin those who advocate this policy, "we have had a most distinct promise that nothing whatever will be done to interfere

with their religious opinions." Nothing will be done; no, nothing. Yet, unless you have made the most solemn stipulations to the contrary, they will attend mass; and amid the smoke of incense, the ringing of bells and the adoration of the altar, it is quite possible their Protestantism may evaporate. But suppose your daughters are allowed to stay outside meekly reading their Prayer books while mass is being performed, what then? Will nothing then be done to tamper with their faith? No, nothing. They will only pet, fondle and caress your children till they think the convent is the very gate of heaven, leading straight up to the Paradise of God. They will give them prizes without number, whether they deserve them or not, and all to please them and you. They will work on their feelings and gratify all their fancies, until at last they will gain their point, and claim your children for themselves.

But what, I ask, are the secular advantages of sending your children to Roman Catholic schools and convents? "Many," I am told in reply. "The whole circle of the sciences is traversed, and everything that the polite and refined should know is freely taught, and at the least possible expense." But, I ask, in

what department of human learning will not the peculiar theology of the Church of Rome be apparent? Will you trust her text books? Will you have your children learn truthfulness from Bellarmine, and casuistry from the school of Loyola? The histories they will recommend will be peculiarly impartial. They will be particularly reliable in their accounts of the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary and Elizabeth. Sure to give *our* view of these tossed and troubled times. No, everything intellectual will be coloured with their peculiar modes of thought, and these dark hues will show themselves on your children all their future life.

Again, suppose no direct Romanism is taught. Suppose your children are left entirely to themselves, what then; if they are not being taught evil, are they being taught good? If they are not being taught Romanism, are they being instructed in Protestantism? Is their spiritual life being advanced; are they growing in the truth? No, you know they are not. At the very time they should be cared for most they are neglected, left to the wayward passions of their hearts, and the cold maxims of a thoughtless world.

To conclude: I do not blame the Roman Catholic Church for using every effort to bring

over your children to her pale; she would be faithless did she not do so. But I beseech you to pause before you place those dearest to you in her power. Some may come back untouched, but others will linger in the convent until you begin to be alarmed, and when at last you urge them to leave they will tell you they intend to be received into the Church of Rome. You may lift up a father's voice or shed a mother's tears, but with the air of a martyr they will tell you they must obey God rather than man, and though it be with pain, will leave your communion for ever.

The present system is doing more to injure our Church than tongue can tell. Many come back only to find fault with the simplicity of the Church of England, and to institute changes our Protestantism cannot consent to. Let parents, therefore, awake to their duty. Let them see that their children are brought up in the pure principles of our reformed faith; that Christ in His glorious beauty is set before them, and not the gloomy superstitions of a Church darkened with the errors of a thousand years.

I might, if time allowed me, show a remedy on the score of expense. I might point out the

imperative duty of our founding some public institution where Protestant young ladies might receive a liberal education at a trifling cost, but I must forbear for the present, and await a future opportunity.